

George Washington Carver National Monument

3 miles south of Monument

Diamond

The George Washington Carver National Monument encompasses 210 acres of the original 240-acre Moses Carver farm. The monument was established to preserve the birthplace and commemorate the rise from slavery of Carver, of whose life demonstrates the opportunities afforded in the United States to men of ability and energy, regardless of their origins, and whose accomplishments are today a living part of America's heritage.

George Washington Carver was born around 1861 to slave parents on the plantation of Moses and Susan Carver. According to a story told by Carver's owner, Carver and his mother were kidnaped by a gang of nightriders during the Civil War and taken to Arkansas. Moses Carver sent out a search party and was able to retrieve the baby after giving a racehorse as ransom, but the mother was never seen again. Carver was seriously ill with whooping cough at the time of his rescue and remained in frail health as a result of various illnesses for much of his life. His sicknesses prevented him from doing manual labor and afforded him time to spend in the woods inspecting the plant and animal life.

After the Civil War Carver remained with his former owners, learning tasks such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and laundering and also learning to read. As a teen, Carver traveled to the nearby town of Neosho to attend a school for black children. Afterward he traveled around the Midwest, working various jobs and attending school whenever possible. He finally graduated from high school in Minneapolis, Kansas. During these years Carver continued and broadened his interest in plant life, collecting and recording specimens and learning to sketch and paint them.

In 1886 Carver became a homesteader on government land in Kansas. He mortgaged his claim in 1888 for \$300 and opened a laundry in Winterset, Iowa. Encouraged by friends, he enrolled in Simpson College in Indianola, studying natural sciences, music, and art. On the recommendation of one of his professors, Carver was admitted to Iowa State College at Ames in the spring of 1891 to study botany. Carver excelled in his scientific studies and in art as well, receiving an honorable mention for a still life painting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. In 1894 Carver was awarded a bachelor's degree, becoming the first African American to receive a degree from Iowa State College.

After Carver's graduation, Louis Pammell, one of Carver's professors, offered him a position as an assistant in the college's agricultural experiment station. While working at the station, Carver studied for his master's degree in botany. He soon became recognized as an expert in mycology and received invitations to lecture throughout the state. He received his master's degree in 1896.

In the spring of that year, he received an invitation from Booker T. Washington, principal of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama (now Tuskegee University; see also Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, Macon County, Alabama), to establish a department of agriculture at Tuskegee. Carver would have to start the department from scratch—there was neither a curriculum nor laboratory equipment in place—but he accepted the invitation because he felt education was essential to freedom for African Americans. As a result of Booker T. Washington's efforts, an agricultural experimentation station and agricultural school were established at Tuskegee on February 15, 1897, by an act of the Alabama legislature, which appropriated \$1,500 annually for operations and maintenance. Carver was named director of the

experiment station.

In this new capacity, Carver dedicated himself to discovering a way to restore fertility to soil depleted of nutrients by the repeated planting of a single crop such as cotton or tobacco, as was the case throughout the South. Carver's experiments with organic and chemical fertilizers and nutrient-restoring crops were taken out of the laboratory as he toured rural communities giving lectures and demonstrations. He brought farmers to the experimentation station to show them how his theories worked. In a further outreach effort, he published a series of bulletins explaining his ideas in simple language that semiliterate people could read and understand. Carver also initiated the "movable school" program, in which he and an assistant drove a mule-drawn wagon through the farmlands, teaching farmers improved techniques for growing and storing food.

Carver is best known, however, as a pioneer in the science of chemurgy, the industrial utilization of agricultural products. From the peanut he developed 300 different products, ranging from face powder to wood stains. Appearing before the House Ways and Means Committee in 1921 to demonstrate some of these products, Carver influenced the implementation of the highest protective tariff ever enjoyed by the peanut industry.

Also widely publicized were Carver's experiments with the sweet potato, from which he developed 118 products, and his production of dyes from southern clay and plants. Carver's fame spread worldwide, and he received requests for assistance from several foreign countries. In the early 1920s he received an offer from Thomas A. Edison to join his team of scientists in New Jersey, but Carver declined, saying he preferred to remain in the South where farmers were greatly in need of his skills.

In 1940 Carver contributed his \$60,000 in life savings to the establishment of the George Washington Carver Research Foundation, an organization that now has more than 100 faculty and a budget of \$5 million to fund scientific research, training, and outreach projects. Carver was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts of Great Britain in 1916. He received honorary doctorate degrees from Simpson College in 1928 and the University of Rochester in 1941. He was awarded the Spingarn Medal in 1923 and the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Medal in 1939.

Carver died at Tuskegee on January 5, 1943, and is buried on the campus next to Booker T. Washington. In 1953 Congress authorized the George Washington Carver National Monument, the first federal monument dedicated to an African American. The George Washington Carver National Monument was added to the National Park System on October 15, 1966 (see also George Washington Carver Homestead Site, Ness County, Kansas). [B 10/15/66 NHL NPS, 66000114]